

Pan-Seared Pork Chops with Fig & Grainy Mustard

Sides: Baked Sweet Potatoes and Sautéed Chard

A few wayward figs, discovered on a neighbor's tree, inspired this sauce. I made it with hard cider but it would be equally delicious with a little leftover dry white wine. For the most flavor, use bone-in pork chops from a reputable pork producer; if you use thinner boneless chops, you will only need to cook them for a few minutes on each side.

Serve the chops with baked sweet potatoes and sautéed chard (see below—put the potatoes in the oven first!). Also, because the pork doesn't take long to cook, you should have time to make a quick dessert, balance the checkbook (does anyone still do that?), or check your email while the potatoes begin to bake. I'd choose Meyer Lemon Cream.

Extra Credit: If anyone can tell me why this delicious combo smells to me like peanuts . . .

TIME: 40 minutes

SHOP: UP TO 4 DAYS AHEAD

SERVES: 4

4 bone-in pork chops, about 1" thick (1/2 pound each), or boneless chops
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1 tablespoon olive oil
8 figs, cut into 8 wedges each
1/4 cup whole grain or regular Dijon mustard
1/4 cup heavy cream
1 cup hard apple cider or dry white wine
1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat (if you don't have a 14" skillet, you can also use 2 smaller pans – just divide the sauce ingredients between two pans and pour them together at the end). Season the pork chops on both sides with salt and pepper. Add the oil to the hot pan, swirl to coat, and add the chops. Cook the pork for 4 to 6 minutes per side (2 to 3 minutes each for boneless chops), or until the pork reaches 140 degrees in the center, measured with an instant-read thermometer. (Note: the pork should release from the pan after it's done searing; no need to move it around in the pan when it's cooking!) Transfer the pork to a serving plate, tent with foil, and set aside.

Add the figs to the pork skillet, and sauté for about a minute, or until they begin to soften (the seeds will begin to come out of the fruit). Add the

mustard, cream, cider, and thyme, and whisk the sauce until combined. Increase the heat to high, and simmer until the sauce has reduced and thickened, about 4 minutes. Spoon the sauce and the figs over the pork, and serve immediately.

For the sweet potatoes: Before starting anything else, poke the potatoes (1 small potato per person) a few times with a fork, and bake on a foil-lined sheet in a preheated 400-degree oven for 35 to 45 minutes, or until soft all the way through. Serve with butter or sour cream.

For the chard: Remember, dark greens cook down a LOT. Peel the green parts off the tough stalks of two bunches of chard, tear the leaves into hand-sized pieces, wash them thoroughly in a large bowl of water, and drain them well in a colander. When you flip the pork chops to cook on the second side, preheat a big skillet. Add the olive oil and crushed garlic, then the chard and a little salt and pepper and cook, stirring often. When the leaves are soft, squeeze a little lemon over the chard, and serve hot.